

far from her old neighborhood, Blaise found her perfect house, though it needed some fixing, too.

Her father, Steve Decker, a former civil engineer for the state, lives nearby on a 250-acre farm that has been in the Decker family for generations.

Blaise has slowly remodeled the house, painting the rooms in deep, rich colors, and the kitchen a cheery 1950s red and white. Walls hold framed photos with military themes—she is an avid student of military history—and photos of Mike Blaise. His Air Cavalry hat is in the living room, resting atop the triangular case that holds his medals and the American flag that draped his casket.

It was in this home that Blaise came to terms with her loss. For the better part of a year, she spent hours in her office, writing chapters and e-mailing them to Dana White, a writer-editor in New York, who co-authored her book.

She says the toughest part wasn't writing about the night in Iraq when she was told of her husband's helicopter accident.

"It's easy to be sad about the sad things," she says. "It was the happy parts that were the hardest. They made me miss him more."

The Mike Blaise she loved was a big guy who took her deer hunting and made her laugh and liked to sing country songs in karaoke bars.

The book is, in fact, full of happy times, a tribute to growing up in small-town America.

She tells tales on her younger brother and three older sisters—in particular her sister Lindsey, who served in Iraq with the Missouri National Guard.

Blaise writes that her mother's injury in a car accident was the day that changed everything for her. Marie Decker survived but now lives in a long-term care facility.

The book is also a tribute to the tenacity of women who have found homes and carved out careers in the predominantly male world of the military. Blaise has little patience with recent political skirmishes that would have limited the roles of servicewomen in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"This genie is out of the bottle, and no amount of coaxing will get her back in," she says in her book.

But mostly, the book is a tribute to the life and love of a devoted couple who struggled to maintain their marriage through long separations and their share of disappointments. She says her late husband would have insisted on such honesty.

"Mike would have been uncomfortable being glorified," she says.

She still has Scout, the dog the Blaises adopted while serving in Korea. He is a prize, with his baby-seal face and Yodali-like ears, a black and white softie who warily eyes strangers and barks at the Amish buggies that pass by their house on U.S. Highway 36.

Though writing the book was an emotional ordeal, it also helped her come to grips with her sadness, she says.

"The day I finished writing, I felt an overwhelming sense of peace," she says.

THE NEXT CHAPTER

Blaise jokes that some people in Macon feared she was writing a tell-all. And, in effect, that's what she did—she told it all, as it related to her life.

"I think her experience growing up was all of our experiences. Nothing could shock us," said Sharon Pennington, who teaches business and computer classes at Atlanta and remembers Mike Blaise as a shy youngster, two years younger than she is.

Kathy Baker, the school superintendent's secretary, was first in line to have Blaise autograph her book.

"I haven't read it. I can't," said Baker, her eyes growing moist. "It's too close."

Baker knows many of Blaise's relatives, including Mike's grandfather, Virgil, whom everyone called Grampy. He died while the Blaises were still in Iraq, and Mike Blaise is buried next to him in Shelby Memorial Cemetery.

Blaise says she's not really sure what she will do with the rest of her life. She says she would consider writing another book, perhaps about grief, which she knows a lot about. Though people gave her books on grief, she found them less than helpful with their flowery sentiments. Her book would be more real.

"It's hard to grieve," she says. "It sucks, and it's going to suck for a long time."

In the meantime, Blaise has joined the Missouri National Guard's 175th Military Police, based in Columbia, because being in the military remains important to her.

"It's the one thing that I do that's for the greater good," she says.

When the unit was sent to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, she found the deployment satisfying in a new way.

"I had never done anything that helped Americans," Blaise said.

Blaise recently got engaged to a helicopter pilot who knew her late husband in flight school. Ironically, it was Mike Blaise's affection for his Harley-Davidson motorcycle that brought this new love into her life. They met while riding their Harleys to the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally in South Dakota, fulfilling a wish that Mike had made to attend the event after the war.

Blaise says she wasn't looking for romance, and neither was her fiancée. It was an unexpected gift, another of those life's blessings she often talks about.

"Knowing that Mike knew him somehow eases the guilt," she says. "God doesn't always agree with what you set for yourself."

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

FAIR MINIMUM WAGE ACT OF 2007

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 2, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2) to amend the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 to provide for an increase in the Federal minimum wage.

Pending:

Reid (for Baucus) amendment No. 100, in the nature of a substitute.

McConnell (for Gregg) amendment No. 101 (to amendment No. 100), to provide Congress a second look at wasteful spending by establishing enhanced rescission authority under fast-track procedures.

Sununu amendment No. 112 (to amendment No. 100), to prevent the closure and defunding of certain women's business centers.

Kyl amendment No. 115 (to amendment No. 100), to extend through December 31, 2008, the depreciation treatment of leasehold, restaurant, and retail space improvements.

Bunning amendment No. 119 (to amendment No. 100), to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to repeal the 1993 income tax increase on Social Security benefits.

Enzi (for Ensign/Inhofe) amendment No. 152 (to amendment No. 100), to reduce document fraud, prevent identity theft, and pre-

serve the integrity of the Social Security system.

Enzi (for Ensign) amendment No. 153 (to amendment No. 100), to preserve and protect Social Security benefits of American workers, including those making minimum wage, and to help ensure greater congressional oversight of the Social Security system by requiring that both Houses of Congress approve a totalization agreement before the agreement, giving foreign workers Social Security benefits, can go into effect.

Enzi (for Ensign) amendment No. 154 (to amendment No. 100), to improve access to affordable health care.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the hour of 10:37 having arrived, there will be 1 hour of debate in relation to amendment No. 101.

The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mr. GREGG. I ask unanimous consent that during quorum calls in this hour, the time be equally divided on both sides.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. KENNEDY. How much time is left and how is it divided?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority controls 26 minutes, half of which belongs to the Senator from Massachusetts. The other half belongs to the Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, could you tell us the entire allotted time?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republicans control 21 minutes.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I yield myself 5 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, we are going to be voting on the minimum wage this morning. Hopefully, the Senate will vote for what I consider to be a clean bill—a clean bill being legislation that will increase the minimum wage to \$7.25 over a 2-year period.

There will be another measure that will be voted on that Senator GREGG and Senator CONRAD will address, which is a line-item veto. But the fundamental issue we have before the Senate is the issue of an increase in the minimum wage—an increase in the minimum wage which has not taken place over the period of the last 10 years, and which I am very hopeful we will get strong bipartisan support for.

If you look over the history of the minimum wage, the nine different times we have raised the minimum wage, we have had bipartisan support for that increase. It has only been in the very recent years that Republican leadership has led the fight against it. We now have new leadership in the